COVID-19 Vaccines: Frequently Asked Questions

We now have vaccines to address this unprecedented public health crisis. See below for answers to common questions about COVID-19 vaccines.

1. Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.
Millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines under **the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history**. CDC recommends you get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible. If you have a history of allergic reactions to vaccines, ask your doctor to help you decide about the COVID-19 vaccine.

2. How were COVID-19 vaccines developed so quickly?

Vaccine makers had the resources they needed very quickly.
The global health community came together to fight this pandemic. COVID-19 is new, but coronaviruses are not. Scientists around the world used years of research to build the vaccine. They shared data as they worked. They used new technologies. Vaccine makers were supplied with funding for the process. All of these factors helped scientists quickly produce a safe and effective vaccine.

3. How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The vaccines teach your body to recognize COVID-19 so it is prepared to fight it.
The Moderna™ and Pfizer-BioNTech™ vaccines are messenger RNA vaccines (mRNA). mRNA provides the instructions your body needs to build a small protein that looks like a piece of COVID-19. This helps your body recognize the virus if you become infected. This protects you, and helps kill the virus before you can spread it to others. Viral vector vaccines, like Jannsen, also provide instructions to build the spike protein found on the surface of COVID-19. However, this type of vaccine uses a harmless strand of another virus to deliver the instructions.

4. How do I find out if I am eligible?

Check the COVID-19 Vaccine webpage to see if it's your turn: https://coronavirus-sd.com/vaccine.
You may also hear from your doctor directly, depending on which group you fall in. San Diego County is following California state guidelines to plan the order of phases.

5. How much do COVID-19 vaccinations cost?

No one will have to pay for the vaccine.
Check first to see if you can receive the vaccine from the provider you normally go to. If they are not offering it, or you don't have a regular provider, the County can provide the vaccine. You can schedule a vaccination through the County website. Insurance is not required to receive the vaccine at no cost.

6. If I already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need the vaccine?
Yes, the CDC recommends you get vaccinated, even if you had COVID-19.
There is no evidence that recovering from a COVID-19 infection prevents you from becoming infected again. Some people have even had COVID-19 more than once. You need to wait 90 days after you heal from COVID-19 to receive the vaccine. You should also wait 14 days between the COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccines, including the flu shot.

7. Do I still have to wear a mask after I receive the vaccine?
Yes, you should follow all COVID-19 safety habits until this pandemic is over.
Vaccines provide strong protection against infection. However, no vaccine can give you 100% protection. We also don't know if you can still spread the virus to other people after vaccination. If the vaccine keeps you from getting sick, you may get COVID-19 and spread it without knowing it. **Using all of the tools to slow the spread of COVID-19 helps protect you and everyone around you.** Continue to be COVIDSAFE: wash your hands, watch your distance when around others you don't live with, and wear a mask over your nose and mouth. It will take time to vaccinate enough people for herd immunity.

8. What is herd immunity? How many people does it take to achieve it?
When enough people become immune to a disease, it makes its spread less likely. Vaccines are our best tool to help protect people from disease. The vaccines teach our bodies how to fight off diseases, such as COVID-19. The more people who are vaccinated, the more our community is protected, even those who are not immune themselves. This community-wide protection is herd immunity.
Herd immunity varies from disease to disease. We don't know yet how many people will need the vaccine to build herd immunity from COVID-19. This is why it is important to vaccinate as many as possible and follow all of our safety measures to slow the spread. Wash your hands, watch your distance, and wear a mask over your nose and mouth and get the vaccine when it's your turn.

9. I never get sick. Why do I need the vaccine?
People can appear healthy, and still carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others.
Becoming vaccinated helps your body fight the virus, so you are less likely to spread it to others. There are some people who cannot get the vaccine, such as children under 6 months old. Additionally, vaccines are not approved yet for people less than 16 years old. This means there are many people still vulnerable until there is a vaccine for most ages. Even if you do not get sick often, many around you are at risk for complications, such as hospitalization and death. Ending this pandemic takes a community effort.

10. Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for pregnant women?
Many pregnant women have safely received the vaccine. No harmful effects have been reported.
However, pregnant women weren't included in the first clinical trials. There are now clinical trials in progress to test the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant women. Some women who participated in the initial trials later became pregnant and did not suffer a harmful reaction. Women should consult with their healthcare providers to decide if they should receive the vaccine.

11. Can children receive the vaccine?

We don't know yet if children under 16 years of age can receive the vaccine.

The Pfizer-BioNTech™ vaccine is approved for people 16 years and older. The Moderna™ and Janssen™ vaccines are approved for people 18 and older. The clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines did not include children younger than 16, so currently we do not know the effects on children. Clinical trials are in progress with children 12-15 years. In addition, clinical trials will soon be conducted for children 6 months to 11 years of age. Soon, we will learn much more.

12. If you have a medical condition, can you get the vaccine?

People with medical conditions can receive COVID-19 vaccines. However, if you have a concern about risks, ask your doctor.

People with certain pre-existing conditions are at a higher risk of severe illness if they get the coronavirus. Receiving the vaccine is less of health risk than getting COVID-19.

13. Are there side effects?

When you are vaccinated, there are some mild side effects that go away in a day or two. Side effects are a sign that the vaccine is working.

Side effects could include:

- Your arm may be sore where you received the shot. You can apply a cool, wet washcloth to reduce pain.
- You may also experience mild flu symptoms, like chills, headache and fever. You can drink plenty of fluids and dress lightly. Rest will also help your body recover.

If your side effects are worrying you or don't seem to be going away, call your doctor.

14. Is it possible to be allergic to the vaccine?

Allergic reactions are *extremely* rare, but they are possible. After you receive the vaccine, you will stay at the vaccination site for a brief time in case you have a reaction.

- People with a history of severe allergic reactions will be monitored for at least 30 minutes.
- All other people will be monitored for at least 15 minutes after getting the vaccine.

During this time, you will be told to pay attention to signs of an allergic reaction. These could include a swollen tongue or throat, or difficulty breathing. Vaccination providers will have medications and equipment on site to treat reactions. These supplies can include epinephrine, antihistamines, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, and timing devices to check your pulse.

15. Who are the best sources of information if I have more questions?

Your healthcare provider team is the best source to address questions you have about the vaccine and your own health risks.

You may hear different ideas about the vaccine in the community and on social media. It is natural to turn to close friends and family when we have concerns. However, it is best to ask a healthcare professional if you have questions, so you are getting answers based on evidence. You can also go to trusted sources, such as the County of San Diego, the California Department of Public Health or The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updates to guidance and information are made on all of these web resources as they become available.